



# CAP History and Organization

Civil Air Patrol boasts a rich history built on a spirit of volunteerism. The CAP mission has changed over the years – we no longer search for Nazi submarines – but CAP members continue to donate countless hours in community service. Today, CAP is known for its three humanitarian missions: aerospace education, cadet programs, and emergency services. We observe many of the traditions of the U.S. Air Force, as its auxiliary, and we organize ourselves following a military-style chain of command.



## GOALS FOR THIS MODULE:

1. Discuss the historic origins of CAP.
2. Identify and describe the three primary missions of CAP.
3. Outline CAP's basic organizational structure.
4. Explain why CAP considers squadrons to be the heart of the organization.
5. Describe the role of CAP-USAF.

## *Part 1* **Legacy of Bravery**

Civil Air Patrol was conceived in the late 1930s by legendary New Jersey aviation advocate Gill Robb Wilson, who foresaw general aviation's potential to supplement America's military operations. With the help of New York mayor Fiorello La Guardia, the new Civil Air Patrol was established on December 1, 1941, just days before the Japanese attacked Pearl Harbor.

The CAP insignia, a red three-bladed propeller in the Civil Defense white-triangle-in-blue-circle, began appearing on private aircraft everywhere. CAP's initial focus was to be reconnaissance flying, but the civilian group's mission expanded when German submarines began to prey on American ships off the coast of the United States. In response, CAP planes began carrying bombs and depth charges. A CAP crew from Rehoboth Beach, DE, was the first to interrupt a Nazi sub attack, saving a tanker off Cape May, NJ. Coastal patrol missions were dangerous work.

By the end of the war, CAP's coastal patrol had flown 24 million miles. CAP found 173 submarines, attacked 57, hit 10 and sank two. A German commander later confirmed that coastal U-boat operations were withdrawn from the United States "because of those damned little red and yellow airplanes [of the CAP]." By the end of the war, 64 CAP members had lost their lives in the line of duty.

Following the war, the Congress created the U.S. Air Force, in 1947, and designated CAP as its official civilian auxiliary, in 1948.

## *Part 2*

### **Today's Missions**

Today, CAP performs three main missions, as chartered by the U.S. Congress:

#### ***Aerospace Education***

CAP builds enthusiasm for aviation and space through its aerospace education programs. CAP's cadets and adult members learn about aviation history and the scientific principles



that make flight possible. Conferences, textbooks, websites, and activity guides are available to CAP members.

The public benefits from CAP's aerospace education programs, too. CAP provides educators at all grade levels with resources that help teachers incorporate aviation, space, and technology themes into their students' curriculum.

#### ***Cadet Programs***

Through CAP's Cadet Program, young people (ages 12-20) develop into responsible citizens and become tomorrow's aerospace leaders. The program is organized around five elements: leadership, aerospace, fitness, character, and activities. As cadets participate in these five elements, they progress through a series of sixteen achievements, earning honors and



increased responsibilities along the way. Adult volunteers supervise the cadets and help them develop leadership skills. CAP

inspires in youth a love of aviation, and equips them with the character and skills they will need to succeed in adult life.

#### ***Emergency Services***

Best known for its members' work in search and rescue and disaster relief missions, CAP is expanding its role in the 21st century to include an increasing number of homeland security and counter-drug missions, and is incorporating digital and hyper-spectral imaging technology into its life-saving work. CAP members undergo rigorous training to perform these missions safely and cost-effectively, serving as pilots, communicators, ground team members, and more. Shortly after 9/11, a CAP aircrew was the first to fly a civilian aircraft over Ground Zero, providing authorities with vital images of the fallen World Trade Center.



## **Part 3**

### **CAP's Organizational Structure**

Civil Air Patrol is a private, nonprofit corporation chartered under a special Act of Congress. Additionally, CAP is the auxiliary of the U.S. Air Force when it performs Air Force-assigned missions. It uses an organizational structure that is similar to a military chain of command.

#### ***Policy-Setting Boards***

At the top of the organizational structure is the CAP Board of Governors, which is accountable to the Congress. The BoG is comprised of Air Force officers, CAP volunteers (including the CAP national commander and national vice commander), and representatives from aerospace-related organizations.

Assisting the BoG in setting CAP's goals and policies are the National Board and National Executive Committee. These two boards are comprised exclusively of CAP volunteers, except for one Air Force representative.

#### ***CAP Regions***

CAP divides the United States into eight areas known as regions. Each region is known by a geographic name (i.e.: Northeast Region). Regions are mostly administrative units. Their main role is to monitor and support the 5 to 9 wings in their geographic area.

#### ***CAP Wings***

There are 52 wings in CAP, one for each state, the District of Columbia, and Puerto Rico. A wing is comprised of the wing headquarters and all units within its geographical boundaries. Wings have operational and administrative

responsibilities and normally maintain working relationships with state and local government agencies in the field of emergency management.

#### ***CAP Groups***

In wings that have a large geographic area, or are highly populated, the wing commander may create groups. The main role of the group is to supervise and assist its squadrons. Some groups are active, fully-staffed units that frequently host training activities. Other groups are staffed only by a handful of members who focus mostly on administrative support and serve as a liaison between the squadron and the wing.

#### ***CAP Squadrons***

The squadron is the community-level organization of CAP and the heart of the organization. In CAP, the

basic operational unit is the squadron – all other echelons work to support it. Wing commanders may activate squadrons whenever there is a minimum of 15 members in a unit, three of whom must be adult members. There are approximately 1,500 squadrons in CAP nation-wide.

CAP charts three types of squadrons:

- *Senior Squadron* -- comprised entirely of adult members
- *Cadet Squadron* -- comprised primarily of cadets, with a minimum of three adult members to meet supervisory, administrative and training requirements
- *Composite Squadron* -- comprised of both adult members and cadets; conducts activities for both adults and cadets.

#### ***CAP Flights***

The flight is the smallest CAP membership unit. To organize a flight, a minimum of eight

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members are required, three of whom must be adult members. Typically a flight is formed in sparsely populated areas where there are insufficient numbers of individuals to start a squadron.

### ***CAP National Headquarters***

Located at Maxwell Air Force Base, AL, the main role of CAP National Headquarters is to help wings and squadrons carry-out CAP's missions. The headquarters helps implement policy, but is not a policy-setting organization. A staff of about 150 civilians (many of whom are CAP members) supports the more than 60,000 volunteers throughout the nation. These civilian employees include wing administrators, who provide administrative support to CAP wings.

### ***CAP-USAF***

The organization serving as CAP's link with the Air Force is known as CAP-USAF. Co-located with CAP National Headquarters at Maxwell AFB, AL, CAP-USAF oversees and advises CAP. It is comprised of active duty, reserve, and civilian Air Force personnel. Most CAP wings also have a state director (an Air Force civilian) and a number of Air Force Reservists who help CAP leaders at the state and local level. CAP-USAF falls under Air University in the Air Force's Air Education and Training Command.



## **Conclusion**

There are many strengths in CAP's organizational structure. As volunteers, leaders at every level have a great sense of ownership and pride in CAP. New members who get excited about the opportunity to serve in CAP may one day find themselves in positions of leadership. At the local level, leaders can tailor the unit's activities to match the interests of its members. But as with any organization that is staffed primarily by volunteers, it is especially important for all members to work together in an atmosphere of teamwork and mutual respect.

As a new CAP member, you are part of an organization with a rich heritage of community service.

